

urine is an indication of value in choosing a wet nurse was made by Blot³ in 1856. With this suggestion we could not agree, for in cases where large quantities of lactose were present in the urine the nutritive value of the milk, as gauged by the nutrition of the child, was inferior. The milk may be rich in lactose, yet poor in nutritive value, or for some reason more lactose is absorbed and excreted. It is important to remember that the larger amounts of lactose are found at the onset of lactation or at its cessation, especially where weaning has been recommended, as a certain amount of breast distension usually occurs.

I am, Sirs, yours faithfully,

Curzon-street, Mayfair, W., April 19th, 1897. F. J. MCCANN.

"SHOULD EPILEPTICS MARRY?"

To the Editors of THE LANCET.

SIRS,—Sexual reproduction with its natural variations is as inadequate as Dr. Campbell's previous explanation of coincidence to account for the cases I recorded, nor can I accept the "dictum of an eminent biologist" when it is opposed to a plain matter of fact. Dr. Campbell's doubt of the transmission of gout is contrary to all experience, his explanation of inherited baldness savours too strongly of the *virtus dormitiva* to be intelligible, his argument of circumcision and the docking of horses needs to be viewed in the light of the functional insignificance of the parts docked, and the proneness of the transplanted negro to tubercle has been otherwise explained, but it does not bear on this question.

Dr. Reid dismisses the theory of pangenesis, adopts the view of Weismann, and says "the germ cell, so far as we know, is indebted to the other cells only for shelter and nutrition. This consideration renders unbelievable the hypothesis that acquired traits are transmissible." Even allowing him so to beg the question of the limited dependence of the germ cell, "so far as we know"—and we know nothing whatever about it—this consideration does nothing of the sort. If the germ cells depend for shelter and nutrition on the other cells they are therefore as liable to modification by them as any organism is to the influence of its surroundings. The crabs and other animals that made their home in such caves as those of Kentucky depended for shelter and nutrition on their surroundings no more and no less than the blastogenic cells depend on their surrounding cells. Through disuse of their eyes for successive generations they finally lost those organs, and we find the crab in which "the foot-stalk of the eye remains, though the eye is gone." Now, does any sane person contend that such a result is a coincidence, or is it a natural variation of sexual reproduction, or is it a proof of the continuity of the germ plasm? It is, of course, an example of the same process of heredity, though slower in operation, that is at work in those cases of the transmission of the results of lesions that I have recorded.

The attitude of those who follow Weismann's theory is well illustrated by your extract from Dr. Pearse's communication; they have accepted a hypothesis, and if the facts will not tally with it, then so much the worse for the facts. There is no mere hypothesis under the sun that is sufficient to justify us in concluding *a priori* that acquired lesions cannot be transmitted. Surely the more scientific method would be to investigate cases of transmission, and then to frame a hypothesis that will tally with established facts.

I am, Sirs, yours faithfully,

St. John's Wood-park, N.W., April 3rd, 1897. W. G. THISTLE.

* * * This correspondence must now cease.—ED. L.

"THE MIDWIVES REGISTRATION BILL."

To the Editors of THE LANCET.

SIRS,—The hopeless muddle into which the promoters of midwife registration have fallen must be my apology for again trespassing on your space in order to supplement my note appearing in THE LANCET of March 27th. The time for academic discussion and for destructive criticism and personal recrimination is past, and the public, Parliament, and the medical profession, or that part of it, at least, who take any interest in the subject, anxiously look for a solution. This is not to be found in the Bill now before the Commons: (1) because it will register the *bonâ-fide*

midwife of two years' standing—i.e., the "Gamp" and other untrained and ignorant women who practise midwifery and, according to the medical advocates of registration, scatter disease and death broadcast; this alone would condemn the Bill; (2) the Bill makes no provision for after-nursing, which is a fatal defect if its promoters intend it to apply to "the poor"; (3) there is no provision for medical or surgical aid in emergencies or for the payment of medical men or midwife in such cases occurring among "the poor"; (4) its administration is utterly at fault, as a central board largely composed of specialists know absolutely nothing of local wants and circumstances; and it is manifestly unfair and impolitic to thrust police duties on the medical officer of health or other medical man, whose office, under the Bill, as detective, spy, and informer would be invidious and degrading. Thus, while the Bill would intensify all the existing evils it would (5) sow discord among male and female midwifery practitioners, promote slander and backbiting, and to a large extent deprive the poor of the prompt assistance and sympathy of medical men, whether they are paid or not, and which is denied them by the qualified midwife unless her fee is paid in advance. It is absurd to say, as the promoters express it (*vide the Times*, Feb. 26th), "that the midwife must always stand entirely outside the medical profession." On the contrary, when registered she will be an integral part of it, and severely compete with fully qualified medical men, while she is dependent upon them in cases of difficulty and emergency. This must strike the most obtuse as grossly unfair. The promoters of registration give away their case in the following sentence (*vide loc. cit.*): "The utmost that is proposed or could be done is to regulate the practice of those who take the name of midwife; nothing will or can prevent any person whatever from practising in this capacity. We demand that the name of midwife shall be protected, and shall be in itself a guarantee that the bearer of it is competent for the work she undertakes!" In the name of common sense, what does the poor woman whose slender means are not equal to a fee of more than 5s. or 7s. 6d. at the outside care for a diplomated and registered midwife, clad in gown and ribbons, who requires another woman to wait upon her and to do the housekeeping, washing, and cooking? And if "any person" can practise midwifery under the registration Bill, how will this meet the case of its medical supporters, who look to it to abolish puerperal fever and the grievous maladies due to the practice of midwifery by the incompetent? The scheme of the Bill, as I said in my former letter, stands "self-condemned," and we must seek for a better.

Having had the midwife question under my observation for nearly five years in the parish of East Sheen, and having regard to the abuses which gradually crept in under the aegis of catering for "the poor," who were at first required to pay only 5s., then 7s. 6d., and with an increase of the wage limit from 30s. to 50s. per week an enhanced fee of 10s., and finding the comparatively rich taking advantage of the midwife's fees and "the poor" left very much to their own resources, I took action in order (1) to have the wage limit reduced again, and in this I succeeded; and (2) to put forward "a scheme" which was intended to meet the requirements of the working and small shop-keeping classes and at the same time to make an honest effort to solve the midwife question to the advantage of the public, the profession, and the midwives themselves. This was done publicly at the annual meeting of the Local Nursing Association (who employ a professional nurse and a diplomated midwife) on Feb. 4th. The vicar was chairman and about forty representatives of the *élite* of the parish were present, and after full discussion and subsequent examination of my proposals in committee they wrote: "The committee authorise me to say that they consider the changes quite impracticable; the class of women whom it is desired to help could not possibly pay for both doctor and nurse. The result would be that they would employ neither, and would revert to the unskilled though kindly meant help of their neighbours. This is exactly what the society desires to avoid." It is none the less what I desire to avoid, as will immediately appear. But the promoters of registration should carefully note the terms employed and the contention of the local society, as these are distinctly adverse to the principle of the Bill, which registers the "Gamp" and recognises the "friendly neighbour." The local committee, however, recognised the injustice of a 50s. wage limit, which in two years had reduced the midwifery practice of the medical men from 50 to 60 per cent., and the

³ Comptes Rendus, xliii., p. 676, 1856.